

Osteoarthritis

What is Osteoarthritis?

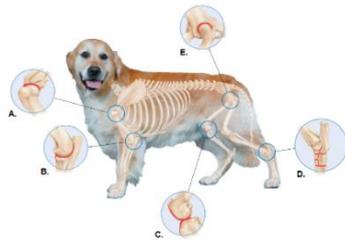
Osteoarthritis (more commonly known simply as arthritis) is a progressive, and degenerative disease of joints. Inflammation within the joint leads to damage to the surface of the cartilage. This leads to pain and stiffness. It may affect a single joint, or many joints.

What causes this condition?

There are many causes of osteoarthritis. Developmental bone abnormalities such as hip and elbow dysplasia and luxating patellars can lead to abnormal joints that are prone to arthritis. This occurs as a result of abnormal friction in these malformed joints. In this case Osteoarthritis may start to develop very early in life, even before your animal is one year of age.

Degenerative diseases such as cruciate disease and intervertebral disc disease will also lead to arthritis. Less commonly auto-immune disease can lead to arthritis, typically affecting many joints.

Arthritis can occur after trauma. Animals with fractures that extend into joints may develop arthritis in the affect area. Finally, osteoarthritis can occur as a result of normal aging “wear and tear” to joints.



Osteoarthritis is under diagnosed in cats. Arthritic cats manage their pain by reducing their activity. This is often interpreted by owners as the cat is just getting older. A study published in the Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association in 2002 found that 90% of cats over 12 years of age had evidence of osteoarthritis present of radiographs (x-rays).

How is Osteoarthritis diagnosed?

Definitive diagnosis of arthritis is based on radiographs (x-rays). The bone changes that results from joint inflammation can be seen on these images. In some cases osteoarthritis is presumed based on typical signs, and improvement after trial treatment.

What can I do to help my animal with arthritis?

There are a variety of treatment options available for animals with arthritis. The treatment chosen will be tailored to your dog and its particular needs, but the following is a run-down of the most common treatment choices. Starting treatment early in the disease will slow down its progression and give your animal the best quality of life in the long term.

If treatment is delayed until the disease is severe, the improvement achieved with treatment will be less.

Weight Management

Weight control is especially important for animals with osteoarthritis. Extra weight leads to extra pressure in already sore joints. Keeping animals lean, or effective weight loss will help reduce the pain associated with this condition. It can be challenging to get these animals to lose weight. The pain of their arthritis means that they are less active, and can be the reason for their weight gain in the first place. If you are having trouble maintaining appropriate weight in your dog, please book in for one of our free weight consultations. We can create a diet tailored to your animal. This may be using your current food. Alternatively, a variety of prescription weight loss foods are available, and are often more effective than feed restriction alone.



Bedding

Soft warm bedding will help may your pet more comfortable. Allowing them to sleep inside during the colder months will help reduce the stiffness of joints in the morning. Electric blankets/beds are available for dogs, and may help keep joint comfortable in cold weather.

Controlled Exercise

Walking

Too much exercise or irregular exercise will cause stiffness and pain in patients with arthritis. Controlled regular (daily) exercise is beneficial. Gentle movement stimulates production of joint fluid, and encourages removal of old, inflamed fluid from joints. These dogs are better off having regular, short walks, than infrequent long walks. Cats are better at self-regulating their exercise, and are unlikely to over exercise.

Hydrotherapy/swimming

Hydrotherapy and swimming are good for arthritic dogs. The water takes the weight off the dog's joints, while enabling muscle and joint movements to reduce stiffness and encourage muscle strength.



Hydrotherapy on an underwater treadmill is available at Advanced Vetcare in Kensington. Physiotherapist qualified in animal physiotherapy are also available for referral at this location to assist in developing controlled exercise plans.

Prescription Diets

There are several prescription diets on the market to aid in reduction of signs of arthritis. These foods are high in Omega-3 and Omega-6 fats, which act as an anti-inflammatory in these sore joints. Some of these foods also

contain additional glucosamine and chondroitin, the building block for healthy cartilage.

Some of the prescription diets available that we recommend and use for osteoarthritis include:

- Hill's Prescription diet J/D (for cats and dogs with arthritis),
- Hills Metabolic+Mobility (for arthritic dogs prone to weight gain),
- Hills K/D+Mobility (for arthritic animals with kidney disease)
- Delicate care Mobility (Dogs only, for dogs with arthritis and food sensitivities)

Natural Remedies

A variety of natural remedies are available that aid in the treatment of arthritis. Some of the common supplements are discussed below. Herbal and vitamin supplements are less well-regulated than medications. Quality control issues mean that some of these products do not contain as much of the active ingredients as they claim, so purchasing from a reliable brand will better ensure efficacy. These products can be given in addition to, or instead of formulated joint diets. They take up to 6 weeks for full effect, and must be used daily, long term. They are unlikely to provide any benefit if given only occasionally.



Glucosamine, Chondroitin and Magnesium

These ingredients are the building blocks for cartilage. These products are joint protective, and can slow, or prevent the development of arthritis. These are useful for animals predisposed to arthritis. This may be due to age, breed, conformation issues or history of injuries. Adding these products to the diet can maintain cartilage health, and increase the efficacy of cartrophen treatment. Several products are available that provide these substances. These products require a minimum of 3-6 weeks to start to be effective and must be used daily.

- Joint Guard – this is a powdered product for cats and dogs that can be sprinkled on the food
- Blackmores / PAW Osteo chew. This provides these substances in an easy to give treat form.
- Blackmores Cosequin. This is a double strength formula of the osteo chew. It comes as a capsule that can be sprinkled on food.

Omega 3+6

These are "good" fats, and may be sourced from fish or plant sources. These products reduce inflammation in many parts of the body, including the joints. They are added to treatment when pets start to show signs of arthritis. The ratio of omega 3 compared to Omega 6 is important, as too

much omega 6 can actually stimulate inflammation. Some products are heat treated, leading to destruction of the good oils during manufacture. Pet specific products are often more palatable and easier to give. Some pet specific products we recommend are listed below:

- **PAW OSTEOSUPPORT** – these are powdered capsules produced from Green lipped Mussel. This contains DHA, EPA and ETA fats, which chemically results in a wider mechanism of anti-inflammatory action than regular fish oil.
- **Blackmores/ PAW FISH OIL 500**. This is a concentrated fish oil product that comes in an easy to use pump pack.

Surgery

Surgery is only appropriate for treatment of arthritis in certain cases. Disease such as cruciate ligament disease or hip or elbow dysplasia may benefit from surgical intervention. Surgery is often not appropriate for animals with many affected joints, and these patients may benefit more from medical intervention.

Medications

For some animals, the above treatments are not sufficient, and medications to reduce pain and stiffness are needed. Combining medications with the other above options will reduce the amount of medication needed. Achieving lower effective doses will also reduce side effects of these medications. Common medications used in arthritis are discussed below:



- **Pentosan Polysulfate:** This is a chondro-protective drug. These medications are given as an injection under the skin, and work in all joints. This medication slows the destruction of the cartilage that occurs as a result of inflammation within an arthritic joint.
- **Anti-inflammatories:** anti-inflammatory drugs are used to relieve the pain of arthritis. Their primary action is to remove the inflammation that is occurring in the joint. Low doses of these medications long term will slow the destruction of the cartilage, and slow the progression of arthritis.
- **Other pain killers:** For animals where all of the above treatments are failing to make them adequately comfortable, or your pet is getting unacceptable side effects, a range of other pain relieving drugs are available. These will be discussed for an individual patient.